

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Problem and Need

For more than fifty years, state fish and wildlife agencies have benefited from funds provided by the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (Pittman-Robertson), the Federal Aid in Sport Fisheries Restoration Act (Dingell-Johnson), and the Wallop-Breaux Act, to support the conservation and management of game fish and wildlife species. These funds, collected through federal excise taxes at the manufacturers' level, have been critical to the establishment of long-term agency conservation planning related to game species.

Yet conservation efforts for the majority of fish and wildlife species, those that are not hunted or fished, have in large part been opportunistic and crisis-driven, limited by a lack of funding, and by a lack of strategic approaches to species and habitat conservation. Today, with more than 1,000 species listed on the Federal Endangered and Threatened species list, and many more species in decline, the need has never been greater for a complimentary source of funding to support the conservation, protection, and restoration of the full array of wildlife species, especially those not covered under traditional funding strategies.

Legislative Mandate and Guidance

As a compromise following failed efforts to pass the Conservation and Reinvestment Act, in 2001 Congress developed new conservation funding legislation, the Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program and the State Wildlife Grants Program. These programs were designed to assist states by providing annual allocations for the development and implementation of programs to benefit wildlife and their habitats. The funding was intended to supplement, not duplicate, existing fish and wildlife programs, and to target species in greatest need of conservation, species indicative of the diversity and health of the states' wildlife, and species with low and declining populations, as deemed appropriate by the states' fish and wildlife agencies.

Under these new funding measures, states were required to develop a Wildlife Action Plan by October 2005, integrating information across eight required elements :

1. Information on the distribution and abundance of species of wildlife, including low and declining populations as the state fish and wildlife agency deems appropriate, that are indicative of the diversity and health of the state's wildlife;
2. Descriptions of locations and relative condition of key habitats and community types essential to conservation of species identified in (1);
3. Descriptions of problems which may adversely affect species identified in (1) or their habitats, and priority research and survey efforts needed to identify factors which may assist in restoration and improved conservation of these species and habitats;
4. Descriptions of conservation actions proposed to conserve the identified species and habitats and priorities for implementing such actions;
5. Proposed plans for monitoring species identified in (1) and their habitats, for monitoring the effectiveness of the conservation actions proposed in (4), and for adapting these conservation actions to respond appropriately to new information or changing conditions;
6. Descriptions of procedures to review the Plan at intervals not to exceed ten years;
7. Plans for coordinating the development, implementation, review, and revision of the Plan with federal, state, and local agencies and Indian tribes that manage significant land and water areas within the state or administer programs that significantly affect the conservation of identified species and habitats;
8. Documentation of broad public participation during development and implementation of the Plan.